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INFO RUEHZG/NATO EU COLLECTIVE IMMEDIATE
RUEHCV/AMEMBASSY CARACAS IMMEDIATE 0006
RUEHBUL/AMEMBASSY KABUL IMMEDIATE 0029
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C O N F I D E N T I A L BRATISLAVA 000038

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TAGS: PREL PGOV AF LO

SUBJECT: SLOVAK TROOPS IN AFGHANISTAN, PM FICO,S OVERSEAS TRAVELS

Classified By: DCM Lawrence Silverman for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) PM Fico,s Chief of Protocol Marek Estok (please protect) told DCM January 19 that Fico has made his decision about whether to move Slovak engineering troops from Kabul to Kandahar, although Estok demurred from saying what that decision is. Fico travels to Kandahar January 25, but it is not clear whether he will announce the decision then, have FM Kubis do so the next day at the NATO Ministerial in Brussels, or hold off longer. However, contrary to earlier signs that Fico would announce the decision himself, Estok told us that there was an active consideration of Kubis possibly doing the honors to an obviously appropriate NATO audience. DCM noted that Slovakia had missed a chance to speak up at Riga, and that the announcement of an affirmative decision at the Ministerial would send a very positive signal in a forum designed to have NATO allies step further up to the plate to help the Afghan people.

Believe Me, There's No Pattern to What We're Doing

¶2. (C) Estok had asked to meet with DCM to dispel media reports that the Fico government is adopting a new, less Western or U.S.-friendly foreign policy orientation. (Comment: We had been feeding Estok negative international media reporting on Fico,s attendance at a Cuban revolution day reception, an early trip to Libya, and a rumored trip to Venezuela. If the PM did not want to signal any change, we said, the record should be set straight. End comment.) Estok told us he had a message for Washington from the PM: He is not changing Slovakia,s foreign policy orientation. The Libya trip was postponed when the Libyans suddenly said Qaddafi was not available due to a parliamentary session the day of the planned visit. Contrary to initial reports, Fico will raise the plight of the Bulgarian and Palestinian medical workers when he goes to Tripoli. Fico has no plans to visit Venezuela. He would make a Latin American trip in March to Brazil, Argentina and Chile, "period." We took the occasion to show Estok media reports of Chavez,s moves to impose a state of emergency, something directly at odds with Slovakia,s historically strong support for democracy abroad.

¶3. (C) Estok had less of a defense for the PM,s attendance at the Cuban national day reception, except to say that it was the PM,s personal decision and that he had planned to attend all national day receptions in Bratislava. We emphasized that given the GOS,s traditional low-level attendance at the Cuban event, the PM,s presence was a reward to the Havana regime, without exacting any price, and contrary to his own Interior Minister,s "adoption" of a Cuban dissident. (Comment. As FM Kubis informed the

Ambassador earlier, the GOS has a few activities lined up to try to show it is on the right side of the Cuban issue. End comment)

And I Still Want to Go to America

¶4. (C) Despite Fico's decision not to visit Washington January 29 at the invitation of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, Estok told us Fico would like to come in late April or early May for meetings with the Administration and on the Hill, as well as to accept invitations from the Chamber and from U.S. Steel.

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